

MACAULAY'S CONCEPTION OF HISTORY

27

phraseology in Old Mortality ; for one half of King James in Hume, and for the other half in the Fortunes of Nigel.¹

Macaulay's words are quoted at length, perhaps at exorbitant length, because it is important to show exactly what he aimed at achieving, before we attempt to judge what he actually achieved. His History is the practical exemplification of the views set forth in his essay. He endeavoured to revive what seemed to him the lost art of historical narrative, to combine the qualities of Thucydides and Tacitus, telling his story as skilfully as the one and describing his personages as vividly as the other, but arranging his subjects as a whole rather better than Thucydides did, and avoiding in his style the over-elaboration and lack of simplicity which he blamed in Tacitus. But he took Scott for his model too. He endeavoured to make his History interesting by adding the characteristic details which historians usually omitted. He endeavoured to make the field of history include social as well as political life, and to give it some of the charm of historical romance by employing the materials the historical novelist employed and describing common people as well as kings and statesmen. He said at the beginning of his book :

I should very imperfectly execute the task

which I have
undertaken if I were merely to treat of battles
and sieges,
of the rise and fall of administrations, of
intrigues in the
palace, and debates in the Parliament* It will
be my
endeavour to relate the history of the people
as well as the
history of the government, to trace the
progress of useful
and ornamental arts, to describe the rise of
religious sects
and the changes of literary taste, to portray
the manners of
successive generations, and not to pass by
with neglect

¹ Ibid, pp. 364-5.